

Man about Town

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entertainment for men

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EVERY TIME HE WON A FIGHT, A LOGGER COLLECTED A RED FEATHER

BY JACK RITCHIE

WHEN WE COME TO TOWN, the truck stop in front of Swenson's Tavern and Hotel and we all pile out and put the red feather in our caps.

I look over my crew, at Olsen, Bjorge, Gullisen, Nilsen, Gjerdset, and Hannig.

I trown at little Hannig who is only five feet, ten. "How come you don't put red feather in your cap?"

Hannig shrug his shoulders. "Why should I do this, Eric? In half-hour it is gone, and I am black and blue."

I am stern. "Never mind," I say. "In my crew, everyone must be man. Put on red feather."

He put it on his cap and sigh. "For three years I have been man. Now I have no front teeth."

Mr. Jones, who is new supervisor from the East and have come to town with us, look curious.

I put hand on his shoulder. He almost drop and this remind me once again how strong I, Eric Krogstead, really am.

"Mr. Jones," I say. "We work all month with the logs, and on payday we come to town and get rid of money. We get drunk and we fight."

He nod. "Of course. What else is there to do?"

I point to feather in my cap. "Every logger come to town with one red feather in his cap. He fight other man with feather in cap. Then winner have two feathers. Simple, no?"

Mr. Jones smile and nod again. "About the simplest thing I ever heard of."

I turn to Hannig. "Hannig," I say. "How many feathers did I come back to camp with last month?"

"Eight feathers," Hannig say.

I smile. "And month before?"

Hannig sigh. "Seven."

I let all admire and then Bjorge speak. "What about three months ago?" He look up at sky so that I cannot look him in eyes.

"Never mind," I say. "We do not go back more than two months."

That was bad time, three months ago. I have four feathers and Lars Rolfson from Bend River, he have four. We fight it out and he go home with eight.

I have since beat hell out of him twice. That is two out of three, and I think that make me better man. Lars is big like me and strong, but I have more brains. This is difference, I think.

We walk through mud of street and up sidewalk to Swenson's. We go inside and who is first man I see?

It is Lars Rolfson at bar.

LARS PUT DOWN his beer chaser. "Ah, ha," he say. "This time it will be different. My ribs is together again."

I put thumbs under my suspenders and shake my head. "You have but two feathers, Lars."

His face get red. "I have been here only one hour." Then he look me over and lower eyebrows. "What you got to talk about, Eric? Only one I see on you."

I hold up my hand. "Lars, you do not understand. Why should we get bloody for one feather or two? Let us wait until we have four or five. Then we fight."

Lars think this over. It take him time. "Right," he say finally. He look at me and admire. "You got brains, Eric. That I have always admit. Why should I break knuckles on you for one lousy feather?"

He pound bar. "Drinks on me, Eric. Tomorrow I smash your head."

We buy each other drinks and after a while Disa Gindt come down from rooms upstairs. She see Hannig and come right over.

She stand with hand out and Hannig get blush in his face. He reach in his pocket and give her most of money he has.

I am surprised, and Disa see this.

"I will take care of Hannig's money," she say. "I am going to see that he buy bridge for front of his mouth, so that he can smile without being old man."

Then she look at Hannig and put hands on her hips. "Take silly feather out of your cap."

Hannig's hand go to his head, but then he look at me and stop. He square shoulders and look back to Disa. "No," he say. "I am man. I will keep feather. For a little while anyway."

Disa glare at me. Then she sniff and walk away.

Hannig meet my eyes. "Right now I am more afraid of you than I am of her. But when I am married, I will be more afraid of her. That is the way marriage is and I will be good husband."

I almost choke on my whiskey. "You are going to marry up with her?" I say it again. "Her?"

Whiteness come into his face. "Put up fists," he say. "Or quick apologize."

I shake my head. "Hannig, I do not want your feather."

"I accept apology," Hannig say. He take drink of his whiskey and begin to brood.

I turn to Mr. Jones. "Is not life funny? This Disa prefer little Hannig to all of them." I lean closer to him and talk low. "Would you believe?" I say. "She does not even charge him."

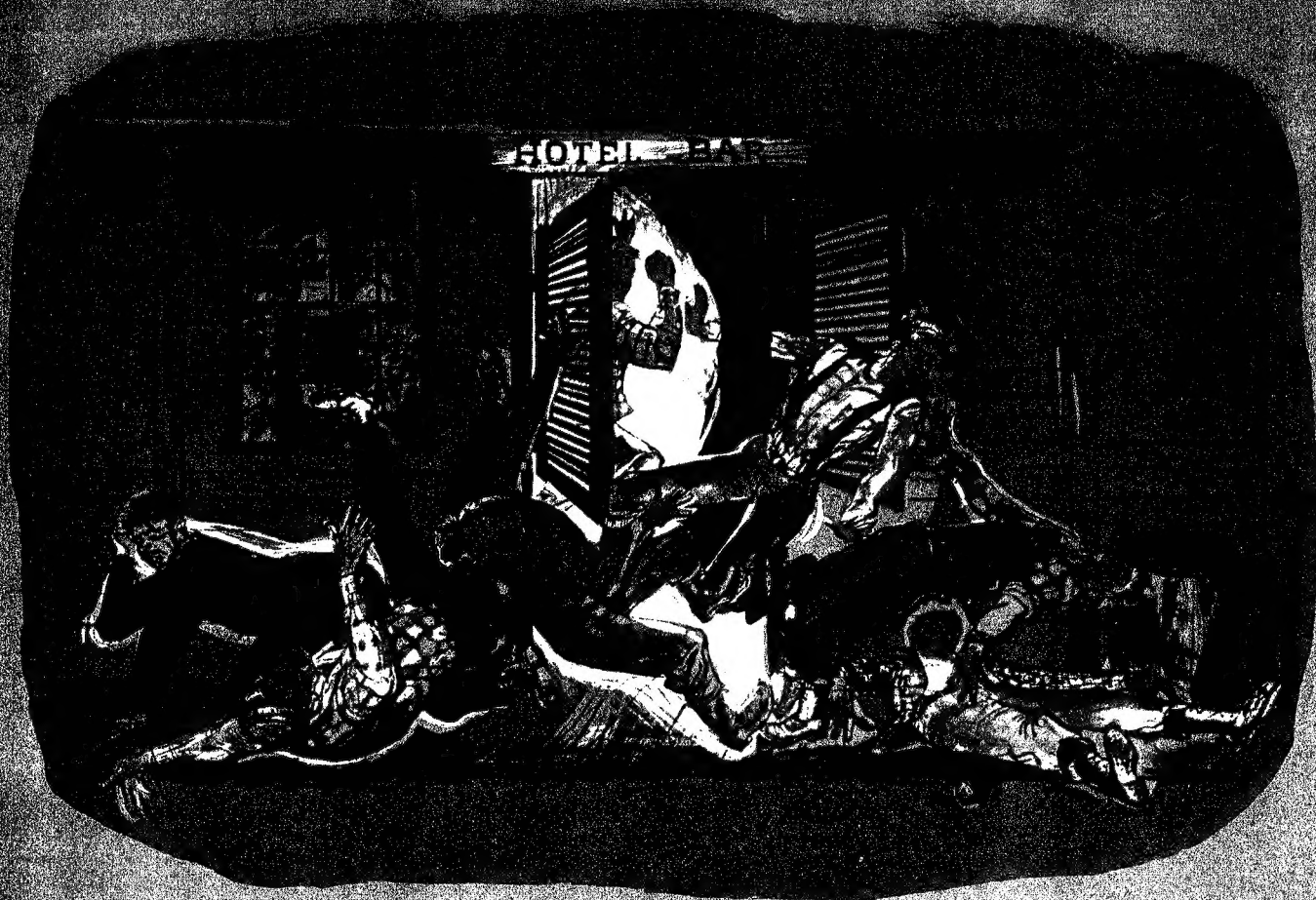
Mr. Jones study Hannig and rub his jaw.

THE DOORS then swing open and big man come into place. He stand in front of all with his thumbs in belt. His hat is low on forehead. On it, is two red feathers and he has great insolence as he look at us.

Lars Rolfson wipe foam from his mustache. "I guess I go work on him."

I put hand on Lars' shoulder. "Lars, this is mine."

THEN, SOME OF THE BOYS BEGAN SPORTING PLUMES OF ANOTHER COLOR!



Blue Feather

I see this victim first. I, Eric, will take this one."

Lars get angry. "A two-feather man fight a two-feather man. This is justice."

My voice is kind. "Lars, old friend. How will I ever get enough feathers to fight you if you take them from under my nose? We will toss coin. I take heads."

Lars think this over. "I will take tails. That is all that is left."

It is heads and I put coin in my pocket before Lars can see that there is heads on other side too.

I walk up to big man who is waiting. He is new face and I think maybe he come from Bergner tract that is now opened on Garson hills.

He look at me and his lips sneer. "You have but one feather. It is hardly worth my sweat."

He is indeed stranger. He does not recognize Eric Krogstaad.

I smile. "Do not hit me too hard. I have weakness because I catch cold."

We begin to fight.

I let him hit me few times, to show him that my brains is protected by thick skull. Then I smile and hit him good.

He is still on his toes, thinking which way to fall, and so I hit him again and settle this matter. I do not stomp him much. He is just poor logger like rest of us and cannot afford big bills at hospital.

I am walking back to bar with three feathers in my cap when I see Dagna Gulbrandsen now come down from upstairs. Her customer come first. He look tired and he go to the bar and order drink.

"Did you see fight, Dagna?" I say. "One minute is all this man last." Dagna is big woman. Tall and strong and not fat. "So," she say. "The little boys is back in town. We are much honored."

I look at her and am puzzled. Why should she talk with this tone in her voice? I remember back to last time I come to town and can find nothing wrong. I think I pay her good. I am not cheap with money.

"Come have drink, Dagna," I say.

She put hands on hips. "You drink too much."

It is not necessary that I must take these words. "I drink when I want," I say. "And it is two times a month. Go back to your business. I will get Ingrid for tonight."

"Ha!" she say. "Ingrid!"

But she look at me and see I mean this. She sigh. "All right. I will have drink."

We have few drinks and then doors open again. This time it is man who is little like Hannig. He look like he has been pushed into room and he have one feather in his cap.

HE LOOK AROUND room and swallow hard. He smile without strength and I notice he have no teeth in front.

I poke Hannig.

Hannig close his eyes.

"He is your size," I say. "Weak like kitten."

Hannig take sad breath. "I will get it over with."

He approach this man. They come close and stand for long minute. Then someone outside of doors yell, "Hit him, Gudmond, or he will die of old age."

Gudmond, for this, I think, is his name, he hit Hannig. From where I see, it is weak blow, but Hannig go down like he is willing and he look pretty good unconscious.

This Gudmond does not look happy when he must put Hannig's feather in his cap. He look even more unhappy when Lars Rolfson approach with smile on his face.

When Lars come back with four feathers in his hat, he has grin.

"It is like taking candy from baby," I say. "I, Eric Krogstaad, do not stoop so low." But I am angry. Why did I not think of this myself first?

It is bad night and I get only one more feather. By twelve o'clock, Dagna help me up to room and I take pint bottle with me.

I sit down and Dagna help me take my shoes off.

"I say again you drink too much," she say.

I look at her. "Thank you. You remind me I have thirst." I take drink from bottle. The room move around a little.

I lay down on bed. "I just rest for a minute," I say.

I put my hands behind head and watch Dagna.

"Dagna," I say. "You are fine woman."

"And hard worker," she say. "Good cook too."

"I hear funny thing that happen today," I say. "Hannig is going to marry Disa."

Dagna's voice go up in air. "Why is this funny?"

"Never mind," I say. I close eyes for few moments.

When I wake up, it is morning, and I am still wearing my clothes and Dagna is not there. My head feel like when Bengt Bjorken throw heavy axe handle at me and does not miss.

I try the pint bottle and in half-hour I feel better. Then I put on my shoes and go downstairs where I have big steak and potatoes in dining room.

OUT IN THE BAR, I find Lars with glass in his hand. His face is painful and so I know that he is thinking.

"Remember, Lars," I say. "We fight it out tonight."

He look at me. "Yah," he say. Then he go back to thinking.

I see Dagna and walk over. "Hey, Dagna," I say. "I forget." I take twenty dollars from my wallet and give it to her.

Her face is cold. She give me back fifteen dollars. "The five dollars I charge for the room," she say. "The fifteen was not spent."

Then her head go high and she pass me like she is marching.

I shrug my shoulders and go back to Lars.

He is quiet for long time. Then he look at me and I see that he has been drinking more than I thought.

"I see blue feathers," he say.

I study him. "Do not be drunk tonight or it will be easy for me," I tell him.

He wave his arm. "Everybody got blue feathers," he say.

Hannig come into the place and he is smoking a cigar. He go to the bar and have a drink.

"See," Lars say. "Look at Hannig's cap."

I look and I see that he is wearing three blue feathers.

I think about this. "What are blue feathers for, Lars?"

Lars slap bar. "I do not ask. To ask is to be greenhorn. I figure this out myself."

I look at Hannig again and then I walk over. "Good morning, Hannig," I say. "Is nice day."

Hannig smile with his no teeth. "Is fine sunny day," he say.

I laugh light. "I see you have three blue feathers."

He laugh more light. "I see you have four red feathers, Eric."

I go back to Lars.

"Well?" he ask.

"Shut up," I say. "I am thinking."

Lars is quiet with respect while he watch me. After three whiskies, I pound fist on bar. "I have it," I say. "I reason this out."

"Always I say you are smart," Lars say.

"It is like consolation prize. When

man lose red feathers, he can no longer fight. This is the rules. So what happen, Lars?"

"I don't know," Lars say.

"Suppose man lose red feather in first half-hour when he come to town. For rest of time he can no longer fight. This is one hell of holiday."

Lars nod. "Is terrible holiday."

I smile. "So loser fight each other for blue feathers. It is like Class B baseball is to major league."

THE DOORS OPEN and it is Gudmond who has knocked out Hannig yesterday. He is also wearing three blue feathers in his cap.

I touch Lars' arm. "Now watch this," I say. "You will see big minor-league fight."

Hannig and Gudmond see each other. They come together and I expect punching, but they shake hands and have drink together.

"Eric," Lars say. "You are dumb Swede."

"You are liar," I say. "I am dumb Norski."

Lars look past me. He put down his glass and point.

It is Olaf Gitter. On right side of his hat band he have two red feathers. On left side is three blue ones.

I close my eyes for few seconds. Then I put down my beer and go up to Olaf. "I guess we fight," I say.

Olaf grin. "This is why I am here. I break your Swede head."

It is surely bad day. "Norski!" I yell. And so we begin hitting. Olaf has strong punches, but I have stronger. He take punch good, but I take punch better.

When he is laying on the floor and cannot get up, I take his hat and I put his two red feathers in mine. I look at the blue feathers and touch.

"No, no!" Hannig say.

I look at him and he is waving finger at me.

He look stern. "You do not take blue feathers."

I take my fingers away and I laugh. "I don't take feathers. I just admire." I throw hat on Olaf's face and walk away.

"Eric," Hannig call after me. "I give thirty-day notice. Disa and I get married. We buy farm."

I turn and look at him. "You are broke. How you can buy farm?"

He get little red. "Disa have money. I give thirty-day notice."

I swear is clouds in sky, but sun is coming through windows. It is hard, but I smile. "This blue feathers is good idea," I say. "It has slipped my mind who invented it."

"Mr. Jones," Hannig say. "He think of it."

On the street I see many other hats with blue feathers. The loggers wear them, but I do not see any on townspeople.

I find Mr. Jones sitting in the sun on a bench in front of general store. He is smoking pipe and watching the people go by.

I stand next to him and help. I do

(Continued on page 50)

rangements to leave for home on the sailboat.

During the following days, Timothy studied Renard's lexicon but with indifferent success. The Doctor's ingenious transliterative symbols might as well have been Japanese. Timothy needed help, and since his scientific interest had been piqued, he asked Anoo to assist him in his task.

She was delighted. She helped him with his pronunciation, and explained in her stilted but melodious English the nuances of sounds and meanings.

They worked together until late in the evening, and Timothy was astounded to find that in his efforts to learn, he had for a time been insulated from the physical attraction of Anoo. He had achieved clinical detachment! He was suddenly overwhelmed with gratitude, like a patient who unexpectedly finds himself recovered from what he had thought was an incurable illness.

WITHOUT REALIZING FULLY what he was doing, he grabbed Anoo and kissed her soundly on the lips. In that instant he had dropped his shield. He was unprepared for the passionate vigor of her response, and he struggled against her for a moment. Then he began to succumb to the luxurious warmth of her body.

Abruptly, in self-horror, he leaped up. "Oh, no," he muttered despair-

ingly. Then he broke for the door.

Sobbing, he ran through the dark forest toward the sound of the softly beating surf. On he ran, stumbling and colliding and falling, until, exhausted, he felt the yielding, tugging sand beneath his feet. Then with a gasp he fell headlong to the beach. He lay there for a few moments collecting himself, and then, suddenly aware of a presence behind him, he sat up.

It was Anoo.

"You very unhappy, Timothee," she said consolingly. "I want help you, please."

Timothy smiled weakly in spite of his pail of self-disgust. She was pleading to help him. Did she know what she was asking? "Empu would not approve of the type of help I need," said Timothy wryly. "I'm afraid I must go back to the states. I am not the right person for this task. I cannot detach myself, as the Doctor would have it. Hell, I don't want to achieve the Doctor's clinical attitude. I just don't want to . . . !"

"You mean Empu when you say 'Doctor'?" asked Anoo, puzzled.

Timothy looked up and nodded. "In our country, it is a term of respect for wisdom and learning." And then, vaguely remembering his language lessons, he asked, "What does Empu mean?"

Anoo looked down and laughed again, a soft, lilting sound of mingled shyness and humor. "It means

'Mighty Lover of Women'—a very much manly, manly man. . . . But only at night," she added almost apologetically. "In daytime, he work very hard."

For a moment, the rush of blood to Timothy's head drowned out the pounding of the surf, the fading sound of Anoo's laughter. "Mighty Lover of Women!" he shouted, scarcely able to believe his ears. "And is he a very manly man?" Timothy asked Anoo with a voice that was strained and loud with indictment. "Is he?" he demanded.

Slightly frightened, Anoo recoiled a step and nodded in slow affirmation.

Timothy fell back on the sand. He began to laugh. Much that he had not understood before, now fell into place. Empu indeed!

He reached for Anoo. She was there, melting softly into his arms.

Later he brushed the sand from her soft, sweeping hair. "Anoo," he whispered, "do you think I can be an Empu too?"

She looked at him, a tender smile playing over her face. "You very great Empu," she told him, "you greatest Empu in all the islands."

Timothy smiled. "You know Anoo, I think I'm going to like it here after all. I think that I can show you that all doctors are magnificent Empus. Yes, I think, I'll stay here!"

"Doctor Timothee is very wise!" said Anoo. ●

BLUE FEATHER (Continued from page 40)

this for fifteen minutes and then I say, "Mostly three blue feathers."

"Yes," he say. "That seems to be about the average. Surprising."

I watch some more. "Funny thing," I say. "People who live in town do not wear them."

HE TAKE PIPE out of his mouth and stare at me. "Oh, really now!"

I clear my throat. "You do not have feathers?"

He look sad and sigh. "I have one. I'll be damned if I wear it."

Again I watch the people. "Mostly three," I say again and shake my head.

"I've seen several fives," Mr. Jones say. "And one six."

"Sure," I say. I snap my fingers. "I forget name of this fellow."

"Alderik," Mr. Jones say.

I walk away.

Alderik is cook for line camp at Peterson's. Some fighter he must be for he has shoulders smaller than waist.

There are many loggers and girls at Swenson's and they have good time. When they see me come in, they make room so that Lars and I can fight.

I see that Lars now have five feathers in his hat and I think this

is good. We now have prime eleven-feather fight.

"We make good show, Lars," I say. "Yah," Lars say. "We stop if one man lose eye. No kicking at family jewels."

I nod my head. "This is rules. Also no broken bottles. Whole bottles is okay, but no broken bottles."

"Fine," Lars say. He look at the people waiting and I see he is unhappy. I look and I am unhappy too. So many blue feathers.

And other differences too. Nobody is making bets. Nobody is making lot of noise. They all stand quiet and they smile.

Lars sigh. "Let us begin."

We begin swinging. I rock him with punches and he do the same for me. We both connect with good ones and fall on top of each other.

Lars get couple of my fingers in his mouth, but he let go when I kick him on ear.

When we get up, I drive him toward bar where he grab beer stein and hit me on head. I step back to wipe beer from my eyes and he put knee in my stomach.

Then he hit me on top of head with his big hands and I am sure my head is big bell. When I get breath, I drive hard right fist to his

stomach. It feel like sack of flour.

LARS MAKE NOISES with his breath and his head is close to floor, so I take hard side of hand and hit him on back of neck.

He go down flat on face and when he get to his knees he look at me with sadness in his eyes. "That was foul blow, Eric," he say.

"It was not foul," I say. "I see this in town movie and Japanese is using it."

Lars get to his feet. "We do not use dirty foreign tricks. We fight clean American."

He pick up heavy ashtray from table and sail it at me. It hit me on the cheek and I see stars. Lars grab me by the throat and choke until I get thumb in his eye and he let go.

We are both bloody.

He is strong, this Lars, but I am king of the woods, and so it is not long after that I hit him so hard that he does not get up.

It is good to be winner of hard fight. I do not stomp him. Why should I? He is my friend.

Then I look at the people. They stand and they look so quiet. There is no congratulations.

I let out my chest big and look at
(Continued on page 66)

them with my good eye. "I fight anybody in the house," I say.

And still they are quiet.

I pick up Lars' hat and put his red feathers in mine. I am now eleven-feather man.

"I fight the whole damn house," I say. "All together. Any color feathers."

Dagna push her way through the people. There is color in her face and she take me by arm. "Come, Eric," she say. "I take you upstairs. I wash blood away."

"It is not time for washing," I say. "It is time for drinking."

Dagna is angry. "Shut up," she say. "No whiskey."

She keep pulling me by arm.

Once more I look at the people who are so silent. Then I feel weak and I go upstairs with Dagna.

I sit on bed and think while Dagna get wash cloth and towel and go to work on my face.

When Dagna finish, she get comb and straighten my hair. "You are dumb Swede," she say.

I look at her, but say nothing.

She stand with folded arms for long time and watch me. Then she sigh and leave room. When she come back, she have fifth of whiskey.

"Go ahead," she say. "Get yourself drunk."

I open bottle and take swallow. I shake my head. "Something is wrong in this town. It is not like old times."

DAGNA LAUGH. "Old times? You talk about old times and you are not yet thirty."

"Well," I say. "I feel like old-timer." I drink more and I think maybe half-hour is gone when I look up and Dagna is still standing there.

I smile and put bottle on table. "I brood no more, Dagna," I say. "We will have good time." I get up and grab her and give her big kiss.

I think she is mad at first, but then she melt and decide to enjoy kiss.

There is moonlight again through the window, I watch Dagna.

I do not know why, but I think of Hannig and Disa.

"It is funny that Hannig would marry Disa," I say.

Dagna is almost turning to me, but she stop. "And again I ask, why is this so funny?"

"Let us not argue," I say.

She stand straight. "Why should we not argue? You do not think Disa is nice girl?"

I can get stubborn too. "No," I say. "I do not think Disa is nice girl. She is a . . . a . . ." I stop. I think it is better I do not use word.

Dagna put hands on hips. "And so am I," she say.

I sit up. "Woman," I say. "In your case it does not matter. I do not marry you."

She does not say anything. I cannot see her face for it is in the darkness, but I know head is bent and she is crying.

I pat beside me. "Come sit over here."

She come and she is indeed sad. "You do not think I am nice girl?" she ask.

I close my eyes. "You are nice girl. Let us not argue."

"Would you not marry me?" she ask.

"Woman," I say. "You are nice girl. We do not discuss further."

She is silent for while and then she say, "First time I see you, I know I love you. You are fine figure of man, Eric."

It is true. "Ho!" I say. "You love me. So why do you charge me? Disa does not charge Hannig."

She wipe her eyes with handkerchief. "It is only way I can get you to save money. In town you would spend money anyway if I did not charge you. You now have saved seven hundred and sixty dollars and it is in the bank."

I am astounded and rub my jaw. "So much? Maybe it is cheaper to get married."

"Yes, Eric," Dagna say and smile.

I get to my feet quick. "Do not jump on my words."

"So strong children we would have," Dagna say. "Boys big as you and with many brains."

"Boys almost big like me," I say. "And I do not think they be smarter than old man. It is not believable for that."

I COME TO MY SENSES. "Always you put words into my mouth," I say. "But I will not be trapped."

Dagna smile. "You were born on farm. It is nice life, no?"

"It is hard work," I say. Then I remember and must be honest. "Some good times on farm too. It is maybe different to own farm than to work for somebody else."

I go over my words and feel fear. I think fast. "Ho!" I say. "How could we buy farm. With lousy seven hundred and sixty dollars?"

"I save money too," Dagna say. "I have six thousand, two hundred and fifty dollars in bank."

I try to figure how many twenty dollars it take to make that much money, but I give up. "I could not trust you," I say. "If I have hired man on farm, I would have to watch. I would not go to town for supplies without thoughts of what you do while I am gone."

She stop my walking back and forth by putting hand on my arm. "You would not have to worry, Eric," she say, soft.

I do not know why it is, but I know she has spoken true words.

Dagna look in my eyes. "From right now, Eric. This second. There will be no others."

I cannot give up so easy. "There

have been many men in your life," I say.

"Not in my life, Eric," she say, quiet. "They mean nothing in my life." She watch me for a while and speak soft. "You have always been angel, Eric?"

I have her this time. "No," I say. "I have been devil. But I have not been paid for being devil."

She smile. "That is sad, Eric. For then we could buy bigger farm."

I sit down and put my head in my hands. It has happened and there is no escape. "All right," I say, "I will give thirty days' notice."

I look at Dagna and there is prettiness in her eyes so great that I am astonished. I have never seen this much before.

I put my arm around her waist. It is good.

And a little later I feel nice sleepiness. I reach for the bottle of whiskey and pull out the cork.

Dagna get up and she go to the dresser and open a drawer.

I smile as I watch the way she move. By George, she is fine figure of woman. I pull cork out of bottle.

Dagna come back and there is light of mischief in her eyes. "Hold out hand," she say.

I HOLD OUT HAND and she put this little package in my palm.

I look at it and I sit up. I put cork back in bottle.

"Oh?" Dagna ask. "You are not drinking?"

"No," I say. "I am not drinking."

I put the lonely little thing on the table and put a glass on it so that it will not blow away.

Dagna is smiling when I reach for her.

In the morning when I go downstairs and out into the street, the sun is shining bright. I walk down middle of the street to where truck is waiting to take me and my crew back to logging camp.

I am stiff and sore from beating Lars give me, and also I am tired, for I have not had any sleep.

But still, I am proud. I keep my head high up in air. I grin and nod to everyone in street. They all nod back to me for I am very important man in town.

Lars struts down street from opposite direction. He too has big smile because he has won more feathers, both colors.

But I am happiest of all people in that morning.

I put my hat down toward front of my head and walk with hands in my pockets.

The men on the street, they have jaws that drop when they see me.

And it is my due, for I have eleven red feathers in my cap.

And the women, they sigh and admire. How they sigh!

And that is my due too.

For also in my cap, I have twelve shining blue feathers. ●